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Equitable Identification of EL students for Special Education by All Teachers

by

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A Capstone submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in

English as a Second Language

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

It was my first year teaching at a large urban high school, Riverbank High School¹, and I had a student that crawled on the floor, made incomprehensible sounds and struggled to do anything but copy. He was on every teacher's radar and much was done to support his learning. The English Language Learner (ELL) team and I did all we thought would help him learn but then asked the special education (SPED) department for help. As a team, we started the intervention process and it took a year and a half for him to qualify for speech services. In the following one and a half years, he learned how to cope at school but was not actually showing growth in his language development. I met his speech pathologist and she too was frustrated because she knew he needed more services. With his current level of services, he would never be ready to exit ELL and might get frustrated to the point of wanting to drop out. The ELL teachers and SPED teachers at my school have seen this scenario too many times. This is the first of many examples I will give of students not receiving equitable services and that is why I am asking my research questions: *How do teachers refer EL students for special education services and how can the process be more equitable for students?*

I have been teaching for five years at two different schools and at both schools I have seen the issue of thinking a student should receive both ELL and SPED services. The first school was a charter school in a large urban city where most students were long-term English learners (ELs). Most had lived in the United States their whole lives but still had not exited the EL program. There was not just one cause for not exiting EL but the most glaring was the need

¹ Name changed to protect identity.

many had for SPED services. They could cope in middle school classrooms with scaffolding, but all the teachers knew high school and college would be difficult if the student did not have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). At the charter school, I never saw a student I did interventions with receive an IEP because of the SPED department not having a process that worked effectively. As a young teacher, I was not able to focus on the one area where they struggled but did what I could to support the student in the moment.

Before my third year of teaching, I got a new job at Riverbank High School in a large urban district. I am a social studies teacher in the Language Academy. I teach Level 1 Junior High 6th – 8th graders, geography and Level 1 Senior High 9th – 10th grade geography. I also teach Level 1.5 Social Studies, which has grades 6th – 10th. Level 1 students have been in the United States for less than one school year. Level 1.5 students have been in the United States for more than one school year but less than two. I co-teach 10th grade English with a mainstream English Language Arts (ELA) teacher. Our class has students that have been in the United States for more than two school years but less than five years. We work to scaffold 10th grade ELA standards so EL students can experience success.

Riverbank High School is a 6th – 12th grade school with 1,198 students in a large urban city with eleven other high schools. It is forty percent Asian/Pacific Islander, nineteen percent Hispanic, thirty three percent Black, six percent White and one percent American Indian. The school is 49.2 percent EL, 17.8 percent SPED and 92.1 percent free/reduced lunch. In 2015, 80.2 percent of seniors graduated while 14.9 percent continued their high school education and 3.3 percent dropped out. In 2015, 12.7 percent of students tested proficient in reading, 10.9 percent tested proficient in math and 6.3 percent were proficient in science on the Minnesota

Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) test (MDE, 2015). The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) classified it as a Focus School, which meant it was in the lowest ten percent of Title I schools and must put interventions in place to improve performance (MDE, 2015). Riverbank High School is a Language Academy site “designed to provide newcomer English learner students in grades 1-12 with intensive English language instruction to foster academic success and develop English language skills” (St. Paul Public Schools, 2015). Students are in sheltered content area classes that work towards content standards of language arts, science and social studies and are in electives with native speaking peers. ELs spend about two years in the language academy program before moving to mainstream classes with native English speaking peers.

Once I started working at Riverbank, I saw the same need for a more equitable SPED referral process for ELs. I taught older students in credit-bearing mainstream high school classes that were very difficult for them. Biology as an EL is difficult, but with an unidentified SPED need it is insurmountable. After many failures and constantly going to summer school, students may become frustrated and drop out. This is a preventable issue if the EL and SPED department can work together on a process that leads to students receiving services. In my five years of teaching and documenting many interventions, only three students have qualified to receive SPED services. The large urban school district requires that two documented interventions are completed and show the problem was not solved (St. Paul Public Schools, 2013). Some of the interventions suggested include: one-on-one directions, reading at a lower reading level, sentence frames when writing and more time to complete assignments. If no improvement is made after the interventions have been tried for a specific amount of time an online referral is completed

and emailed to the principal. The principal looks over the referral and either signs it or returns it to the teacher for review. I have had both scenarios happen at Riverbank. For one student, the principal believed more needed to be done in the regular education classroom before moving on to the next step. The other student was approved and moved to the Child Study Team (CST) where SPED teachers completed a formal evaluation. A flow chart was created by the large urban district and used when any K-12 student is being initially evaluated for SPED services (See Appendix C: *SPPS Special Education Process for Initial Evaluations (K-12)*).

A study by Sanchez explains best practices for referral of ELs into special education. Teachers must do at least two interventions in the area of concern before any formal SPED assessment can take place. Assessments are given in English and, if possible, the student's native language. Factors such as length of time in country, medical concerns, and culture are also all considered. It is also strongly recommended to interview parents in their native language to get a complete picture of the student. A study done in three New York State districts by the Education Development Center, Incorporated found that there are difficulties when identifying ELL students that have learning disabilities and connected elements that are key to not misidentify a student (Sanchez, 2010). I will discuss the five interrelated elements later. The challenges are,

1. Difficulties with policy guidelines.
2. Different stakeholders views about timing the referral of students who are English language learners.
3. Insufficient knowledge among personnel involved in identification.
4. Difficulties providing consistent, adequate services to students who are English language learners.

5. Lack of collaborative structures in pre-referral.
6. Lack of access to assessments that differentiate between second language development and learning disabilities.
7. Lack of consistent monitoring for struggling students who are English language learners.
8. Difficulty obtaining students' previous school records.

My research goal is to identify similar challenges at Riverbank High School and to make sure the process is equitable for all students.

Guiding Question

These experiences with students who have struggled academically lead me to my question: *How do teachers refer EL students for special education services and how can the process be more equitable for students?* My goal is to find out how to make the special education identification process for ELs more transparent and effective for teachers and students. I plan to use the results to help my school and colleagues better serve ELs who have more than language needs. My students with high needs deserve both English Language (EL) and SPED services. A study by Sullivan shows there continues to be conflicting views on the needs of ELs and that creates a pattern of students either being over diagnosed or under referred (Sullivan, 2011). As the population of ELs in the United States continues to rise, educators should lean into this paradox. The issues are complex but that does not mean we deny the students the support they need.

Chapter Overview

In Chapter One, I shared my background with the topic of equitable services for ELs who may also need SPED and how I have seen it work in two schools. I provided an overview of Riverbank High School where the study will take place and the question used to guide the research. In Chapter Two, I will review the literature that addresses SPED identification for ELs. In Chapter Three, I will describe my research method. In Chapter Four, I will lay out my research findings from the interviews. In Chapter Five, I will give a summary discussion that gives the major findings and recommendations for new practices.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This will be a review of literature focusing on studies done on EL students and the SPED referral process and how those intersect throughout the United States. I want to answer my research question: *How do teachers refer EL students for special education services and how can the process be more equitable for students?* My goal is to find out how to make the special education identification process for ELs more transparent and effective for teachers and students. In order to do that, I need to know what research has been done to inform best practice. I also need to have definitions of learning disabilities and the types of assessments used to identify students as being in need of SPED so I can make recommendations for improvement. This chapter reviews best practice for general education students referred into SPED. I will then look specifically at research studies from other districts and find data about the assessments used to identify EL students.

Definition of Special Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines special education as “specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (IDEA, 2010). The law says instruction may be held in the classroom, home, hospitals, institutions and other settings.

Overview of Learning Disabilities

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) (2012) recognizes twelve categories of disabilities which are: Speech/Language Impairment, Developmental Cognitive Disabilities, Physical Impaired, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Visual Impairment, Specific Learning Disabilities,

Emotional/Behavioral Disorders, Deaf-Blind, Other Health Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Traumatic Brain Injury and Developmental Delay. The learning disabilities I chose to focus on are Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Developmental Cognitive Disability (DCD), Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (EBD), Other Health Disorders (OHD), and Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) (MDE, 2012). I am focusing on those learning disabilities because physical impairments such as Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Visual Impairment do not require the same kind of interventions to refer a student to SPED. Each category of disability has a definition and criteria set by the state of Minnesota. For example, DCD is a “condition resulting in significantly below average intellectual functioning and concurrent deficits in adaptive behavior that adversely affects educational performance” (Minnesota Administrative Rules, 2007) and must meet the following criteria; below average adaptive behavior which means scoring below the 15th percentile on a nationally normed assessment and documentation of needs in four of the seven adaptive behavior domains (Minnesota Administrative Rules, 2007). The large urban school district and Riverbank must follow the law to qualify a student for SPED.

In 2008, a report put out by Hillarious for the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition shows the number of EL students served under IDEA for each state. It showed that Minnesota had 6,791 EL students with disabilities, which is 5.66 percent of the total number of ELs in the state. In comparison Oregon had 6,335 ELs with disabilities, which is 7.98 of the total number of ELs in the state. In contrast, California had the largest number of ELs with disabilities at 190,302, which is 28.36 percent of the total number of ELs in the state. Overall, all 50 states, D.C., Puerto Rico and Bureau of Indian Education had 500,964 EL students with disabilities which is 7.6 percent of the total number of ELs in the country. Minnesota is under the

country's average for percentage of the ELs identified with disabilities. Oregon is consistent with the national average; whereas, California exceeds the national average (Hillarious, 2011).

Special Education Referral for EL Students

To determine whether an EL qualifies for special education services, assessments and documentation need to be completed just as would be done for a native English speaker. Assessments must be chosen carefully and according to Chu and Flores that when given in a student's native language results are a more accurate reflection of knowledge and skills (Chu & Flores, 2001). Assessing in English might lead to students not understanding the instructions and reducing the reliability of assessments, which leads to errors in SPED referrals. Per Chu and Flores, many assessments are not available in diverse languages so using interpreters is common. Having language skills is not enough for an interpreter but they must know the context so that meaning can be correctly communicated (Chu & Flores, 2001). The interpreter is not giving the assessments but provides language support to the SPED teacher giving the assessment. In conclusion, best practice is to use a test in the student's native language given by a certified special education teacher who is fluent in the language of the test and then, if that is not possible, a trained translator must aid a licensed SPED teacher to give the assessment.

A study presented by Sullivan points out the discrepancy among states identifying ELs for special education are at a range from zero to 17.3% (Sullivan, 2001). Sullivan shows that overrepresentation and underrepresentation is a result of "misunderstanding of the educational needs of students identified as ELLs" (Sullivan, 2001). The research showed that if a district has a large percent of ELs and English as a Second Language (ESL) certified teachers, students are not disproportionately identified for special education and not placed in the least restrictive

environment (Sullivan, 2001). Sullivan's recommendations are to make sure a district analyzes data not just from the point of race but EL identification. Also, supports must be put in place for the mainstream teachers when teaching ELs so they do not jump to SPED referrals.

Challenges in EL Identification for Special Education

A study done by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northeast and Islands in New York by Sanchez and McTigue examined the practices for identifying EL students for special education services in three districts. REL Northeast & Islands is one of ten Regional Educational Laboratories across the country charged with helping states and districts systematically use data and analysis to answer important issues about education policy and practice with the goal of improving student outcomes. The REL Program is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the US Department of Education. The study focused on the processes used to identify ELs that have learning disabilities as well as challenges from the perspective of administration and teachers. All districts must follow the IDEA Act of 2004, which states that identification for SPED cannot be due to student's lack of English proficiency or appropriate instruction. Sanchez and McTigue's research shows that the IDEA Act leads to challenges, such as limited knowledge about timing of referrals of ELs, limited assessments and how to work as a team during pre-referral (Sanchez & McTigue, 2010).

As mentioned in Chapter One, Sanchez and McTigue highlight five elements to avoid misidentification of learning disabilities in ELs:

1. Adequate professional knowledge
2. Effective instructional practices
3. Effective and valid assessment and interventions

4. Interdepartmental collaborative structures

5. Clear policy guidelines

(Sanchez & McTigue, 2010)

Sanchez and McTigue believe that if these five elements are held in priority at the district level then schools and teachers will have more success identifying ELs with learning disabilities.

Students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) are a growing group of ELs that require more time to learn the English language and literacy. Staehr Fenner said, SIFE students with special needs “represent an “extreme” case of the nexus of ELs and students with disabilities as their complex backgrounds add another layer to the already challenging constructs of ELs with disabilities” (Staehr Fenner, 2011). Staehr Fenner observed, interviewed and gathered data from students and teachers in large metropolitan school districts on the East Coast. The study by Staehr Fenner showed:

1. Traumatic experiences are common among SIFE, and may have influenced their academic progress in the U.S. school setting prior to their placement in special education.
2. SIFE’s strong relationship with special needs teachers on the educational and personal levels is an important factor affecting their attitudes to learning.
3. Teachers working with SIFE and other ELs in the special education context need more training and opportunities for collaboration.
4. SIFE appear to be more engaged in the instruction of academic English when they are provided scaffolded instruction, content related to their experiences and interaction opportunities.

Staehr Fenner suggests that schools with SIFE students that qualify for special education need to provide counseling to help them deal with traumatic experiences and classroom teaching needs to combine academic English through content. The most important thing is that students get the opportunity to share and have their voices heard (Staehr Fenner, 2011).

Use of Response to Intervention

Corbin did a study that looked at when and why teachers start to worry about ELs' language development. The study shows that many teachers have strong reactions when students are not progressing at the same pace as their peers. Many teachers are worriers and push students into the referral process as soon as they see a discrepancy in reading levels. Other teachers are waiters and give students more time because they have seen other ELs struggle and then succeed. Corbin's study then interviewed students and his findings showed a majority of ELs struggle when writing paragraph level discourse (Corbin, 2011). Corbin says that when looking for atypical development a targeted approach using the Response to Intervention (RTI) process reminds all teachers that explicitly teaching academic is critical (Corbin, 2011). Response to Intervention is a process that is designed to look at students in a methodical manner using tiers of instructional levels to determine differences versus disabilities. According to Fuchs and Fuchs, RTI is "understood to represent a meaningful integration of assessment and intervention within a multilevel system to prevent school failure" (Fuchs, 2009). The first tier is making sure all students receive high quality instruction and then screening them to make sure they are making adequate progress. State or district level tests are used to create a baseline and those below grade level will be given extra instruction within the regular classroom. If after a predetermined amount of time the student has not progressed, they are moved to the second tier. Tier 2 is small

group instruction that meets the needs of the students in addition to the general classroom instruction. Students that continue to show little or no progress are moved to the third tier. Tier 3 is instruction designed for one student's specific needs. If a student does not progress after the individual targeted instruction they are evaluated and considered for SPED services. All of the data from interventions during Tiers 1, 2 and 3 are used to decide whether the student might require SPED services (What is Response to Intervention (RTI)?, n.d).

Special Education Process

Artiles and Ortiz laid out how to meet the needs of ELs with disabilities. The first step is a referral committee, which must have access to native language and English level data and interviews with family to see if problems are happening at home, the community and school. This allows the committee to see if the problems are from linguistic or cultural differences. The role of the committee is to create or use interventions that are linguistically and culturally responsive (Artiles and Ortiz, 2010). If the intervention does not show the student progressing the committee moves on to the assessment process. A full and individual evaluation (FIE) must be given in the language that will get the most accurate information on what the child knows. The study says the determination is made with a team that includes EL, general education and SPED teachers that have been involved in the student's instruction and interventions. When an individual educational program (IEP) is created for an EL, Artiles and Ortiz laid out five elements it must have:

1. Level of language proficiency in the native language and in English.
2. Specify language instruction.
3. Provide language intervention.

4. Include a language use plan indicating who will use which language, for what purpose, and for which skills
5. Provide instructional recommendations consistent with principles of first and second language acquisition, native language and ESL instruction

(Artiles, 2010)

The use of native language at home and in instruction, when possible, is also important.

According to Artiles's study the parents should be empowered to support their child's education through the use of their native language.

Klinger and Harry (2006) did a study that focused on the Child Study Team (CST) process and to look at language when identifying an EL for special education. The five steps in the CST special education referral process that the schools used were:

1. The general education teacher expresses concerns and refers students to the CST team.
2. The first CST meeting is held. The general education teacher does pre-referral strategies and the student is monitored.
3. The second CST meeting is held. The decision to refer for a formal evaluation is made and a bilingual assessor assigned.
4. The members of the CST team complete assessments taking into account language and culture.
5. The staffing decisions are made as to who will case manage the student and the environment the student will be placed in. All are done with parental involvement.

The study found misconceptions in when the psychologists thought they could refer ELs. Psychologists at the school were overly cautious when referring beginning ELs to SPED (Klinger and Harry, 2006). Psychologists interviewed during the study said that the CST team made decisions in collaboration but also said they have a lot of influence over the placement of the student. Also during the CST process parents' and teachers' opinions about student's English proficiency were over relied upon to make decisions. At many schools there were marked differences in what happened and what was written on procedural checklists. Klinger stated, "these differences were influenced by the intentions, knowledge, skills, and commitment of CST or multidisciplinary team members" (Klinger and Harry, 2006).

Need for Research

These studies have focused on comparing EL students to other populations or focused on one ethnicity rather than all EL students at a school with a diverse population. Many of the studies compared how EL students are identified to other populations, which does not get to the root of the issue. I would like to see more information isolating EL students, not just creating a baseline off another group of students. Also, many studies have a narrow focus with only one cultural group. Many large districts have a variety of languages represented and need tools to meet those needs. Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) and refugee students also present another set of challenges that have not been studied. Riverbank High School is a part of a large urban district with a diverse EL population. Most of the students are refugees so they have trauma or had less health care as an infant and little education in their native language. The purpose of this paper is to understand how a district wide policy can be implemented at a school with SLIFE and refugee students from diverse backgrounds.

Conclusion

This chapter is an overview of current research that discusses the special education identification of EL students for SPED services. The research guides my comparison of Riverbank High School teacher's identification of EL students for SPED. The next chapter will describe the methods used to answer my question: *How do teachers refer EL students for special education services and how can the process be more equitable for students?* My goal is to find out how to make the SPED identification process for ELs more transparent and effective for teachers and students. In order to answer my question, I need to know how the teachers at Riverbank refer and identify ELs into SPED and how this compares to what I have just discussed in this chapter. For this comparison, I interviewed five teachers and bilingual Educational Assistants (EAs) about how they identify ELs for SPED. I asked them five questions in order to find out how policy is being implemented, strengths and weaknesses of the process and how the process compares to identification of regular education students. Their answers were then compared to current best practice so I can see what areas are equitable or inequitable.

CHAPTER THREE

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the methodologies used in the study. First, qualitative research is defined and justified as the fitting method for the research question. Second, the participants, setting and questions are described. Third, the way the data is analyzed is explained. Lastly, the ethics of the study are explained.

Methodology

Objective

The research question for this study is: *How do teachers refer EL students for special education services and how can the process be more equitable for students?* My goal is to find out how to make the special education identification process for ELs more transparent and effective for teachers and students. I plan to use the results to help my school and colleagues better serve ELs with more than language needs. I feel my students with high academic needs deserve both EL and SPED services. The issues are complex but that does not mean we can't stop trying to find ways to support our students who may have disabilities.

In this chapter, I will describe the research methods used in my study. I interviewed ESL and SPED teachers at Riverbank High School about the SPED identification process for ELs. After interviewing the teachers, I did a comparative analysis on the Riverbank process to best practice according to current research.

Research Method

My method is qualitative research, which is when “the focus is on naturally occurring phenomena and data are primarily recorded in non-numerical form” (Mackey and Gass, 2005).

Qualitative method fits my questions because data is interpreted to find patterns. On the other hand, quantitative research has a narrow research question that informs the collection of data and analysis. That type of research would have been helpful had I a specific hypothesis. My research question was focused on observation of the process and was discovery oriented (Mackey and Gass, 2005). I feel my co-workers and administrators responded well to that openness because it takes the positive intentions of all into account. Quantitative research is too rigid and the conclusion may hurt feelings. The goal is to look at a specific process at one school from many perspectives to find a common set of frustrations surrounding the EL identification process for SPED. I believed change was needed, but if there were not a consensus among teachers around that issue, I thought change would be difficult. I also needed to find a common pattern of frustrations to guide the change or anything done would be too broad. I conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews, which means I had a predetermined set of questions to use as a guide but had the freedom to ask follow up questions to get more information (Mackey and Gass, 2005). The questions were open-ended, which allows people to share their experience and ideas, and “may result in more unexpected and insightful data” (Mackey and Gass, 2005). This type of interview works the best because it allows people to share details and I was able to ask follow up questions to gather more details and clarify specifics.

Questions

Before the interview process could begin a set of interview questions needed to be created. I created a list of fifteen questions that focused on all angles of the SPED identification process, EL best practice and observations of the interviewees. My primary advisor helped refine the list of questions. We eliminated leading, unclear and repetitive questions. That left

eight questions, which is still too many for a semistructured interview, because it doesn't allow time for follow-up questions. I did a pilot study with my peer reader to further refine the questions. After the pilot study, six questions remained. I reviewed her responses to the questions by myself. A question, although resulting in interesting observations, did not fit my research question so I removed it from the list. I now had five questions that fit my research question and allowed for interviewees to share their thoughts and opinions about a specific process.

Pilot Study

I asked the eight questions to my peer reader, who is an EL teacher and has experience with SPED referrals. All the same procedures were followed as the real interviews. She received the questions ahead of time, was asked the questions orally during the interview and gave permission to be recorded. After giving the interview, I asked her opinion about the questions. She shared that two questions resulted in similar response, thus weren't both necessary. She felt another question was too specific and did not allow the interviewee to give details. I used her feedback to further narrow down the question list to five questions.

Interviews

I interviewed four Riverbank classroom teachers and one Karen bilingual educational assistant face to face. The five questions were pre-established and given to the people ahead of time. They were also asked to bring documents that they felt were relevant to the study. Some brought student work to show how they had done interventions with ELs they were referring to SPED. Interviews allowed me to get specific examples of how the large urban district's policy is being implemented.

The interviews were recorded, with the interviewees permission, so I could transcribe them for further analysis. I typed the relevant responses for each interviewee's responses. The relevant parts were those that gave specific examples and opinions about the SPED identification process for ELs. I did not transcribe parts that were off topic. Each interview resulted in one to two pages of typed responses. That allowed me to code for themes. Coding is "making decisions about how to classify or categorize pieces or parts of data" (Mackey and Gass, 2005). I underlined portions of the interviews that I wanted to quote in my paper. I colored coded the transcriptions to find common themes. Themes come after analyzing the data for parts that fit together. It creates patterns and categories that fit into the research question (Mackey and Gass, 2005). The first theme was personal experiences the interviewee had when referring an EL student for SPED. The second theme was their perceived process for identifying a student. The third theme was positive tools and processes the district had for referring EL students to SPED. The last theme was challenges and areas for change that they believed the district and school needed to make.

After themes were identified, I compared the process to what research says is best practice. The literature review laid out how an EL student should be identified. I purposefully picked to read literature that cited similar schools to Riverbank so I could compare the relevant procedures, policies and paperwork that apply to an urban public school. Using that plan, I compared it step by step with what happens at Riverbank. Using the interview responses, policy and documents from Riverbank I created a synopsis of what actually happens at Riverbank to compare to best practices from the literature review.

Data Collection

Participants. I collected data through interviews from a SPED teacher, two ELL teachers, regular education math teacher and Karen bilingual Educational Assistant at Riverbank High School. I sent an email to fifteen staff members I knew had experience working with EL students and SPED referrals. The five that returned my email first were the people I interviewed. Three more staff members returned my email expressing interest after I had completed the interview process.

Setting. Riverbank High School is a 6th – 12th grade school with 1,198 students in a large urban city with eleven other high schools. It is forty percent Asian/Pacific Islander, nineteen percent Hispanic, thirty three percent Black, six percent White and one percent American Indian. The school is 49.2 percent EL, 17.8 percent special education and 92.1 percent Free/Reduced lunch. In 2015 80.2 percent of senior graduation while 14.9 percent continued their high school education and 3.3 percent dropped out. In 2015, 12.7 percent of students testing proficient in Reading, 10.9 percent testing proficient in Math and 6.3 percent in Science on the MCA test (Minnesota Report Card, 2015).

Questions. I asked the following questions to the five interviewees. They all received the questions in advance via email and then were asked orally during the interview. They were given the complete summary of their answers after all interviews were complete.

- What is your role in the district?
- How does the special education referral process differ for native English speakers and ELs at Riverbank?
- Once an EL had been referred for special education testing, what is the process for

- identifying whether the student needs special education services?
- How does your district accommodate the language and cultural needs of an EL student in the special identification process?
 - What are the challenges to identifying ELs for special education services?

Ethics

The study did many things to make sure the rights of the participants were protected. First, the interviewees were given the research objectives and questions before the interview. I told them they would be recorded with an iPad to accurately quote them but after the paper was written all files on the iPad would be deleted. They each read the consent letter, which laid out the objectives of the study and how their participation in the study would be used (See Appendix A: *Interviewee Consent Letter*). I also got written consent from each interviewee before any questions were asked. They then signed the consent form (See Appendix B: *Interviewee Consent Form*). Each interviewee was given a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity. All answered five questions that asked about how EL students are identified for SPED services and their opinion on how equitable the process is for EL students. Also, when quoting the participants, I allowed them to verify the quotes before publishing. All participants' identities were kept anonymous.

Research Submission and Approval

I had to get permission from Hamline University and the large urban district in compliance with each institution's policies before beginning my research. The large urban school district had to approve my research before Hamline University could allow me to proceed. I sent the district a four-page document outlining the purpose, theoretical background and description of student. The district approved my research, so then I could ask Hamline for

permission. Hamline University requires that your research question and process pass the Human Subjects Committee (HSC). The HSC makes sure any research project involving living human subjects is safe and ethical. I sent them an eight-page document that described the site and participants, intended research, consent and confidentiality of the research. Hamline University approved my research.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the methods used to answer how EL students are being identified for SPED services at Riverbank High School. I interviewed Riverbank teachers to understand the process being used. I will then compare the interview responses to best practices from the literature review. That comparison will allow me to see if Riverbank is missing pieces to the identification process that should be added. In Chapter Four, I will lay out my research findings from the interviews. In Chapter Five, I will talk about my conclusions from this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Results

In this chapter, I will summarize the responses made by each interviewee for all the questions. The responses are organized by question and then by each interviewee. Responses are summarized for clarity but relevant and important responses are quoted. Patterns from the interviews will be introduced and further expounded on in Chapter Five.

Interview Response Process

The results from the research will be organized by the interview questions asked to five interviewees. They are all employees of Riverbank High School in a large urban school district. They were contacted by email explaining the purpose of my research, the list of questions and consent form. They knew the research question was: *How do teachers refer EL students for special education services and how can the process be more equitable for students?* Before answering, I told them they would be recorded with an iPad in order to accurately quote them and then they signed the consent form. Each interviewee, as listed on table 4.1, was given a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity. All answered five questions that asked about how EL students are identified for SPED services and their opinion on how equitable the process is for EL students. Discussion will be about the patterns that arose in the referral and identification process of EL students.

In Table 4.1 Interviewee Roles and Response Date,

Name*	Role	Date of Interview
Laura	Secondary Math Teacher	March 10 th , 2016
Mary	Secondary ELL Teacher	March 21 st , 2016
Ku Say	Karen Bilingual Educational Assistant	March 23 rd , 2016
Rita	Secondary ELL Teacher	March 25 th , 2016
Andrea	Secondary Special Education Teacher	April 1 st , 2016

* All names have been changed.

Table 4.1 – *Interviewee Roles and Response Date*

Interview Response Summary

Question 1: What is your role in the district?

This question was first asked for context to the answers of the following questions. Each person's role and experiences led to the knowledge they shared throughout the interview.

Laura has taught math at Riverbank HS for three years. She currently teaches ELL Algebra I and mainstream Pre-Algebra (7th grade). Even though she is a mainstream teacher most of her students are EL identified.

Mary currently teaches the Level 1 high school Language and Literacy course and co-teaches English 9. The Level 1 high school students have been in the United States for a year or less. The students in her co-taught class are in their first year being mainstreamed after being in sheltered classes for the last two years. She has been an EL teacher for 18 years at multiple schools in the large urban district.

Ku Say is a native Karen speaker that graduated from Riverbank High School five years ago. He now works as a bilingual educational assistant at Riverbank HS. As an Educational Assistant (EA), he supports student's academic, mental and social success in school. His role is

integral to the success of EL students at Riverbank HS.

Rita currently teaches Level 2 high school language development and co-teaches English 11. The Level 2 students are in their second year in the United States. The students in her co-taught class are in their first year being mainstreamed after being in sheltered classes for the last two years. She has been an EL teacher for 15 years at multiple schools in the large urban district.

Andrea is a special education teacher that currently teaches Geometry Concepts, Study Skills and co-teaches Geometry. She teaches EL students with IEPs in all her classes. Her caseload of SPED students also has EL students she monitors. She has been teaching at Riverbank HS for three years and has taught at other schools for five years prior.

Question 2: How does the special education referral process differ for native English speakers and ELs at Riverbank?

Laura has heard teachers need to wait three years before referring EL students. In class when communicating with some ELs, you can tell something is different but it takes so long to start the identification process. Once started, the whole process with ELs is slower than with native English speakers when receiving results from SPED assessments. One similarity is that she has provided work samples from the student to the SPED department and math level information for native speakers and ELs. Laura also teaches native English speakers and has been involved in documenting interventions done with them, but has never documented interventions done with ELs.

Mary has not seen many native speakers be referred to SPED so she can't comment on the differences. Throughout the years, she has seen inconsistent referral processes for ELs.

Ku Say has not been a part of a native speaker being referred to SPED so he can't speak to any differences.

Rita has never seen a regular education referral because native speakers are usually referred in lower graders. She believes most mainstream teachers at Riverbank have never seen a SPED referral. According to Rita the EL referrals are, "a lot of hassle and a lot of work".

Andrea knows there is a protocol used just for ELs when referring them to SPED that is different from native speakers. There is a website with different components and the student is tested in their native language. The interpreters are from the district SPED department. An interview is done with the parents for both EL and native speakers.

Question 3: Once an EL had been referred for special education testing, what is the process for identifying whether the student needs special education services?

Laura has received an email from the SPED Department to fill out a part of an online referral evaluation. A woman has come to her class and taken notes to help determine if the student needs services. She knows testing is done but doesn't know specifically what tests.

Mary says the process depends on who is in charge of the SPED department at Riverbank. She has talked to teachers at other schools in the same large urban district, which do not communicate the same process happening at their school. In previous years, the SPED department would take the name of a student and listen to your concerns then take over from that point. Currently it is an "elimination" process and they want several interventions done before being referred. She feels the SPED department is not specific about which interventions they would accept. She said the process is becoming, "harder and harder and longer and longer."

Ku Say first tries to talk to parents and learn their background. He often hears about

medical history of issues during pregnancy or illnesses during childhood. Then, he shares that with the EL teacher and SPED department to help paint a fuller picture. He can see the differences in students' Karen production and reception. He will explain directions or academic concepts in Karen to students in class. Concern rises for students in which translation does not help.

Rita says she can usually tell who has a disability within the first six months of being in her Level 2 class. At first, it looks like the student doesn't want to work or is not engaged. She then has to wait to do an intervention, because if you start too soon SPED will question the validity. Then, EL students leave Level 2 sheltered classes and go to mainstream where the non-EL teachers see a problem. They contact Rita for help so she does interventions in her co-taught English class. She documents two sets of reading, writing or speaking interventions that last six weeks each. After documenting what she has done and how the student has progressed or not progressed, she recommends the student along to SPED for them to move forward.

Andrea says after interventions are complete the documentation goes through the child study team process. The team is made up of certified SPED teachers that decide what assessments to give a student based on what the interventions show. Many types of assessments are given to create a wide student view. The team does not want to make any assumptions about whether it is a learning disability, autism or emotional behavior disorder, etc. A checklist is used to rule out disabilities during the whole process. The team then makes a qualification of a disability at which point the parents can agree or disagree. If the parents agree, then the student has qualified and they receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and services are based on the goals.

Question 4: How does your district accommodate the language and cultural needs of an EL student in the special education identification process?

Laura has seen Educational Assistants (EAs) in the classroom helping students. She has Ku Say in her class helping to translate directions, helping practice math concepts or work with small groups. She hasn't seen any specific language or cultural accommodations in the SPED identification process.

Mary says one reason why the process takes so long is the need for translation. Translators are used in every step of the process, which is necessary but makes everything take longer. She has also seen Karen EAs being consulted to ask students and parents background information.

Ku Say has not seen any accommodations beyond translation. The large urban district's SPED department has their own Karen interpreters, who have been trained to translate by the district. Those specifically trained Karen interpreters are used during the identification process. Ku Say has not been trained in SPED assessment. According to district protocol, Ku Say is not allowed to be a part of the process after initial parent contact and helping students in class. He expressed a willingness to be trained in SPED procedures but would not want it to take away from his current position. Ku Say said it would be knowledge he could use to better help the Karen community understand SPED.

Rita sees translation of documents and tests as an accommodation. Also, parent interviews over the phone or at conferences as a way to accommodate language and cultural needs.

Andrea said the assessments are given in a student's home language with the assistance

of an interpreter. Three common tests are intelligence quotient (IQ), Woodcock Johnson and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) tests. Social workers and nurses are also brought into the process in order to give a fuller picture. They are contacted over email to meet with the student to add to the physical and social-emotional health of the student. For example, the nurse may check for vision and hearing while the social worker assesses the effect of home life on a student's academics.

Question 5: What are the challenges to identifying ELs for special education services?

Laura mentioned that language is a challenge. She questions, "Are they confused because they don't understand the language or because they have a processing delay?" She is reminded of a student she taught two years ago whose language and math skills were so low; he didn't know what was happening in class. Now, she has him again and he is one of the top students in class. Language development is so powerful and is unique to each student. Another challenge at our school is there are many needy students so the EL students aren't always focused on because they try so hard and are respectful. In her Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings with her grade level team more time is spent on behavioral issues than academic concerns, which is usually not the EL students. According to Laura, the EL students are "more docile." Also, many EL students copy each other so teachers can't see an authentic work sample until a test is given. Lastly, she noted that teachers don't have a lot of time to continually push the SPED referral process forward. In her opinion, Riverbank needs a staff member that is an expert in EL and SPED to bring the two departments together so students can be identified.

Mary notes that EL teachers do not have extensive training in what to look for in EL students that point to specific SPED services. The lack of support and time to meet as an EL

team hurts the process so it is more hit or miss. The age of a student, when they come to the U.S., can make the referral process difficult. If they come as a ninth grader, they won't be assessed for one year and maybe even three years and at that point they are almost ready to graduate. She says, "Kids fall through the cracks and drop out."

Her final thought was,

With the kids that come out of refugee camps, interrupted education, poor health and poor nutrition; there is so much going on. Our school has to look at more than just their academics. They say we have a counselor and a nurse but considering how large the EL population is they should be doing more to look where they come from and what do they need today.

One challenge Ku Say sees is classroom teachers give ELs passing grades in class because of "hard work and good behavior." The student hasn't shown proficiency in meeting standards but has been given so much scaffolding in order to pass. The passing grades make it hard to move forward with the SPED referral process. Another challenge is the lack of knowledge in the Karen community about SPED. He talks to parents that know there is something off with their child but don't know about services that can help.

Rita is frustrated by the lack of communication of the SPED department after she completes the interventions. She feels as if they do not update her on the progress or allow her to continue helping move the process along. She has seen many students not be able to graduate or barely graduate with the skills to make it in the workforce let alone college. She acknowledges that SPED is not the answer for every student that struggles but there needs to be a broader system that supports students with limited education be successful after high school.

Andrea said most secondary SPED teachers have not done initial assessments because most students already have an IEP before coming to high school. If a student is new to the U.S. in 6th grade or higher, they will not have an IEP so SPED teachers have to do an initial assessment, which they do not have as much experience completing. She also said before doing assessments much of what is done is guesswork. In order to effectively support the child, assessments must be done to create concrete actions. Parents not speaking English is a challenge before and after the student is receiving SPED services. There is also a lack of teamwork between the EL and SPED department; both support the student but do not do so in a coordinated fashion. Lastly, some tests are not culturally relevant which skews the results of the test.

Patterns from Interview Response

The qualitative research allowed me to interpret patterns in the data. The interviews were open ended so I was able to discover my co-workers experiences with SPED referrals for EL students. After completing the interviews, it was clear there are similar themes in staff understanding of the EL referral process for special education. Every staff member understood that at least two interventions must be done before an EL can be considered for SPED services. It was unclear to staff how to document and communicate the interventions to the SPED team. Another pattern that emerged was a need for more transparency after the interventions are completed. Staff members would like to know more about assessments and the CST process. Lastly, there was frustration between the collaboration of SPED and EL staff members. None of them blamed the other but said lack of time and leadership did not allow for the proper communication needed to move a referral forward.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I summarized the answers to my survey given to five school personnel. Mainstream, EL, SPED teachers and Educational Assistances have described the implementation of the SPED identification process for EL students. Patterns that are shown will now be discussed. Chapter Five will have key findings, implications and possible improvements to be made at Riverbank High School.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary Discussion

This study focuses on the research question: *How do teachers refer EL students for special education services and how can the process be more equitable for students?* My goal is to find out how to make the special education identification process for ELs more transparent and effective for teachers and students. The issues are complex but that does not mean we can't stop trying to find ways to support our students who may have disabilities. I will start by sharing the key findings of the study. Then, I will explain the challenges and areas that can be improved. The findings will be used to help my school and colleagues better serve ELs with more than language needs. My students with high needs deserve to be considered for both EL and SPED services. Riverbank High School has a high percentage of ELs, especially those coming from refugee camps, and more needs to be done to support their learning. I believe these students are an underserved population that needs more attention in research, policy and practice.

Key Findings

The interviews shared a similar process of referring a student for SPED services but lacked details. The large urban district that Riverbank is a part of has a flow chart that lays out the whole process but not one interviewee mentioned it. The flow chart confirms much of the interviewee's knowledge, but adds to it, which provides clarity (See Appendix C: *SPPS Special Education Process for Initial Evaluations (K-12)*). I found this chart after searching the large urban districts website for more specific information regarding procedure. It lays out the beginning starting with general education in the intervention stage moving throughout step by step until the student may receive an IEP. This document would clear up many misconceptions

and give staff members a common ground when discussing students within the process. I will explain the SPED process for initial evaluations from start to finish as shown by the flow chart.

Referral process. A teacher starts by expressing concern about a student's progress to their colleagues to see if there are similar issues in other classrooms. Most often the skill gaps are present in all classes. Teachers decide if a SPED referral is a next step and then who will lead in documenting the interventions. In order to refer a student to SPED, a teacher must do two interventions. The two interventions are done in the classroom in order to address the skill gaps keeping the student from meeting standards. The interventions must last for an undetermined amount of time. There was no consensus on the number of days or weeks an intervention must be done to be valid. There was agreement that the interventions must be documented. Data and evidence from the student must be collected to show that the intervention did not lead to growth in the student's ability. Once two interventions are completed, the SPED department creates an online referral. A team of people must work together to fill in the online referral together. The math teacher, English teacher, EL teacher and nurse fill in different tabs with pertinent information about the student. The largest part of the online referral is entering the information from the interventions. The referral is sent to the principal to review and signed. Once the principal signs the referral it is sent to the Child Study Team (CST). In the case of a parent request of a special education evaluation, the process may skip interventions. Parents meet with the principal to express concerns. The principal discusses the possibility of general education interventions. A parent may agree to interventions or immediately request an evaluation. In the case of an evaluation request general education completes an online referral form while the CST begins reviewing the parent request. Whether general education or the

parent starts the referral process an online referral is completed then reviewed by the principal. The next step is the CST reviewing the referral (See Appendix C: *SPPS Special Education Process for Initial Evaluations (K-12)*).

Testing process. Before any official testing is done the Child Study Team (CST) completes a review of the referral. The CST is all the SPED teachers in the building. They decide whether the student needs to be evaluated. If evaluation is needed then a form called Prior Written Notice (PWN) is sent to parents along with parent rights. If evaluation is not needed, then the process stops, and if a parent requested the evaluation they must be sent a PWN and parent rights within 14 days. The IDEA law mandates the PWN which outlines why the school is taking or not taking action and what they are going to do (See Appendix D: *Part B: Prior Written Notice*). The evaluation process continues once parent consent is obtained. Special education assessments are then completed by a team of specialists such as SPED teacher, speech therapist, psychologist, physical therapist or medical specialist. An Evaluation Report is written and reported to parents within 30 days. If the assessments indicate that the student is eligible for SPED services a team meeting is scheduled. If the student is not eligible the parents must be informed. At the team meeting an initial IEP is shared with the parents. If the IEP is approved and signed by the parents, SPED services may be started for the student.

Challenges/Areas for Improvement

After completing my study, I found three main areas for improvements. Each provides its own unique set of challenges. The first area for improvement is a lack of communication. The interviewees all expressed frustration that there are not enough lines of communication between EL and SPED teachers. EL teachers talk as a department and so do SPED teachers but an avenue

for interdepartmental collaboration is not in place. EL teachers often feel that the requirements of interventions are not clear and change throughout the years. Pieces of the process are misunderstood on both sides, which lead to frustration and resentment. This leads to the next area for improvement, which is leadership. Teachers talk about concerns but they feel the concerns fall on deaf ears and nothing is done to move the process forward. They question who is in charge of keeping the process moving? Parties feel like there is not enough time in the day to do their job and follow through on SPED interventions and referrals. Without leadership to dictate what parties complete each part, nothing is done in a timely manner. The last area for improvement is teacher's lack of knowledge in a variety of areas. Overall, EL teachers want and need more training in undergraduate and graduate programs to understand how to differentiate if they have students that have special needs or should be identified. Conversely, SPED teachers need training on English language development and cultural needs so they can accurately identify and evaluate ELs. The lack of training leads to misconceptions on both sides. It leads to ideas such as 'an EL must be in the country for three years before a SPED evaluation can be completed.' Many parents are also not educated in the American school system procedures and do not know the rights their child has in school. They may not know the skill gaps present in their child's abilities. They may also not feel confident advocating for their child in the American school system. This leaves much up to the teachers and school to communicate with parents and best serve the student.

Implications for Practice

School. After this research and interviews with my peers, I feel the following will improve our process.

1. My EL team needs to have more clear and defined communication with the SPED department. One member of the EL team should be in charge of going to CST meetings when EL students are being discussed. This would allow the student's cultural and language needs to be addressed during evaluation.
2. The EL team would also invite a SPED teacher to department meetings when discussing students of concern. Special education teachers could provide insight into interventions that best fit the skill gap. The teams would hold each other mutually accountable for moving the referral process forward in a timely manner.
3. The EL department could implement the RTI model when expressing student concerns. All students would fall into tier one and would move to tier two if progress towards standards were not being met. The EL team would implement interventions and monitor progress. If a student were not progressing after at least two interventions then an online referral would be started in conjunction with the SPED department.

District. I found that many things could be done at the district level that would create a more equitable referral process for all students.

1. Many people in the district have the misconception that ELs need to be in the country for three years before being referred, which is not true and hurts students. The district needs to change that misconception by educating all staff and making

sure policy protects those students that need both EL and SPED services.

2. The district also needs to invest in authentic tests that can isolate language and focus on other variables such as learning disabilities. Assessments that do not need to be translated or that focus on the skill gap (not language) should be used.
3. The district should also train building Educational Assistants in SPED policies to get better results when working with families and students. The EA at Riverbank High School should know the process when communicating with families. It would create more transparency and trust.
4. The district should create a specific SPED process for initial evaluations when working with middle school and high school SLIFE students. A flowchart would guide the EL and SPED department when going through the referral process. The district also needs to focus on training SPED staff on English language development and SLIFE student's needs.

Policy. At the policy level more needs to be done to address the needs EL students needing SPED services.

1. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) is starting to require schools to identify SLIFE students (See Appendix D: *Determining SLIFE Identification*) but is not provide extra funding to schools or districts with high numbers of SLIFE students. This makes it less of a priority in large districts where budgets are tight and many other programs take priority. Fenner showed that, “traumatic experiences are common among SIFE, and may have influenced their academic progress in the U.S. school setting prior to their placement in special education” (Fenner,

2011). More policies should be created at the state and national level that require districts to allocate funding to the needs of SLIFE students such as training teachers and programming.

2. The Minnesota Department of Education should also create staff development and learning communities around the issues of ELs being equitably referred to SPED. It should invite leading researchers and leaders from other communities to collaborate with teachers in Minnesota. If MDE departments were willing to collaborate with each other and outside leaders ideally the knowledge and skills would trickle down to teachers in the classroom.

Communication of Results

The above suggestions are the changes that are out of my immediate control. The way I choose to communicate the results of this study are within my control. My intent is to use the interviews and research to directly impact the staff and students at my school. This is what I can do to make a difference.

1. The EL department at Riverbank needs to be on the same page in referring ELs to SPED. The place to start is organizing EL students into an RTI tier format. The team would document which students need more in class support and how as a team we are doing that. If as a team we decide that targeted in class support isn't working then two interventions would be decided upon. The way to document the interventions would be consistent among the team members. We would track the students receiving interventions as a team and have a procedure for communicating with the SPED department. RTI would allow "a meaningful

integration of assessment and intervention within a multilevel system to prevent school failure” (Fuchs, 2009).

2. The collaboration between the SPED and EL department can also be strengthened. I will suggest the EL team members rotate going to CST meetings with EL students being discussed. A SPED teacher will be asked to join the EL team’s committee to help guide interventions and proper policy. I will also ask SPED teachers what they think could be done to strengthen the relationship for the benefit of the students. Another way to collaborate would for an EL and SPED teacher to co-teach a support class that has EL students receiving SPED services in it. Sanchez and McTigue identified “interdepartmental collaborative structures” as a way to avoid misidentification of ELs (Sanchez & McTigue, 2010).
3. It would also be helpful to communicate more with similar schools in the large urban district. This is not an issue just at Riverbank. Other schools may have ways to equitably refer EL students to SPED services. The teachers could share interventions used that helped identify skill gaps that led to a student receiving SPED services. There may be ways of documentation and collaboration that they use that Riverbank could also implement.
4. I would also like to co-lead a workshop for general education teachers with a SPED teacher. In the workshop we would share the flowchart used for initial evaluations (See Appendix C: *SPPS Special Education Process for Initial Evaluations (K-12)*). We would go into more detail about how to document

interventions in their classrooms. We would talk about the steps needed to see if an EL student qualifies for SPED. General education teachers would also be able to ask questions about specific students and interventions.

Study Limitations

This study is limited because it only looked at one schools program. The study also interviewed a limited number of people and did not hear from all relevant parties that take part in the SPED referral process at Riverbank. The findings and recommendations cannot be generalized, because different school districts have different student populations, different systems in place, and different resources available.

Implications for Further Research

Upon conducting a review of the literature, it became clear that there has been little research done to understand the needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education students in the American school system. As the number of SLIFE students increase, more research is necessary to ensure that ELs are being well-served. Research on procedures specific to high school and middle school EL students being referred to SPED would be useful. In particular, it would be helpful to know interventions that address skill gaps had by EL students new to the country.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have summarized my findings from the research I conducted and have made suggestions that I hope will allow Riverbank High School to improve EL and SPED teachers' understanding of the SPED identification process for ELs. If this information is made available to all EL teachers, general education and SPED teachers in the school, there will be a

more uniform understanding of the SPED identification process for ELs who are struggling. I hope that these suggestions will help staff to more accurately identify the needs of our ELs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interviewee Consent Letter

Appendix A

Interviewee Consent Letter

Dear _____

I am a graduate student working on an advanced degree in education at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct research with secondary ELL and Special Education teachers in our district from March – May, 2016. The purpose of this letter is to request your participation.

This research is public scholarship and the abstract and final product will be cataloged in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository and that it may be published or used in other ways.

The topic of my master's capstone (thesis) is the Special Education identification process for ELL students. I plan to interview teachers about their personal experience with the identification process. The interviews will be recorded and last about 30 minutes. The interview questions will be provided ahead of time. Lastly, I will compare SPPS identification process to recent research and studies on the topic. After completing the capstone, I will summarize the findings in a report to be distributed to interview participants and to our school administrators.

There is little to no risk if you choose to be interviewed. All results will be confidential and anonymous. Pseudonyms for the district, schools, and participants will be used. The interviews will be conducted at a place and time that are convenient for you. The interview recordings will be destroyed after completion of my study.

Participation in the interview is voluntary, and, at any time, you may decline to be interviewed or to have your interview content deleted from the capstone without negative consequences.

I have received approval from the School of Education at Hamline University and from our district office to conduct this study. The capstone will be cataloged in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository. My results might be included in an article in a professional journal or a session at a professional conference. In all cases, your identity and participation in this study will be confidential.

If you agree to participate, keep this page. Fill out the duplicate agreement to participate on page two and return it to me by mail or copy the form in an email to me no later than March 15th, 2016. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Hanna Winkelman

Humboldt High School
30 E Baker Street
St. Paul, MN 55117
(651) 925-6057 and hanna.winkelman@spps.org

Appendix B

Interviewee Consent Form

Appendix B

Interviewee Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative Interview

Keep this full page for your records.

I have received the letter about your research study for which you will be interviewing EL and special education teachers and analyzing documents related to our district EL special identification system. I understand that being interviewed poses little to no risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the interview portion of the project at any time without negative consequences.

Signature

Date

Appendix C

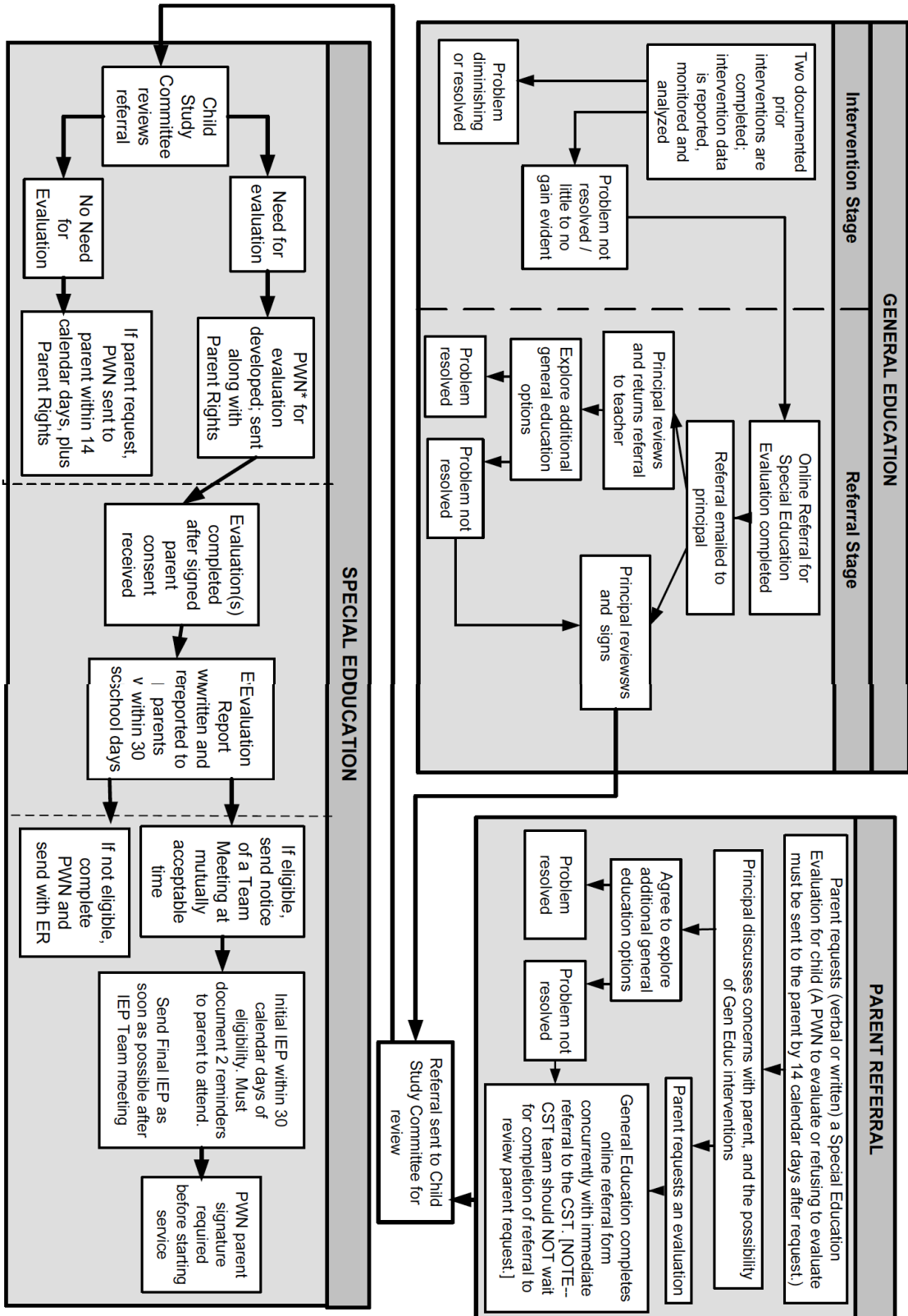
SPPS Special Education Process for Initial Evaluations (K-12)

Appendix C

SPPS Special Education Process for Initial Evaluations (K-12)

Rev. 2.13.13

SPPS Special Education Process for Initial Evaluations (K-12)



Appendix D

Part B: Prior Written Notice

Appendix D

*Part B: Prior Written Notice***Part B PRIOR WRITTEN NOTICE**

Under 34 CFR §300.503(a), the school district must give you a written notice (information received in writing), whenever the school district: (1) Proposes to begin or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of your child or the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to your child; or (2) Refuses to begin or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of your child or the provision of FAPE to your child. The required content under 34 CFR §300.503(b) is listed below in this model form. The school district must provide the notice in understandable language (34 CFR §300.503(c)).

This model form provides a format that States and/or school districts may choose to adopt to construct the form that they will use to provide that notice. The school district will need to insert the required child- and situation-specific information, and must inform parents, as part of the notice, that they have protection under the procedural safeguards of Part B of the IDEA.

PRIOR WRITTEN NOTICE UNDER PART B OF THE IDEA

- Description of the action that the school district proposes or refuses to take:
- Explanation of why the school district is proposing or refusing to take that action:
- Description of each evaluation procedure, assessment, record, or report the school district used in deciding to propose or refuse the action:
- Description of any other choices that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team considered and the reasons why those choices were rejected:
- Description of other reasons why the school district proposed or refused the action:

FORM: PRIOR WRITTEN NOTICE**2**

- Resources for the parents to contact for help in understanding Part B of the IDEA:

- If this notice is not an initial referral for evaluation, how the parent can obtain a copy of a description of the procedural safeguards:

Appendix E

Determining SLIFE Identification

Appendix E

Determining SLIFE Identification

Staff/Office to complete	
Determining SLIFE Identification	
SLIFE Definition: Student with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education who:	
1. Comes from a home where the language usually spoken is other than English; <i>Evidence: At least one question is answered other than English on the HLQ</i>	<div>YES- Go to Next Step <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>NO- Do not identify for SLIFE <input type="checkbox"/></div>
2. Enters school in the United States after grade 6; <i>Evidence: Placement grade is 7th or above</i>	<div>YES- Go to Next Step <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>NO- Do not identify for SLIFE <input type="checkbox"/></div>
3. Has at least two years less schooling than the English learner's peers; <i>Evidence: Transcripts and/or student Oral Interview Questionnaire.</i>	<div>YES- Go to Next Step <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>NO- Do not identify for SLIFE <input type="checkbox"/></div>
4. Functions at least two years below expected grade level in reading; <i>Evidence: Reading Proficiency Level 1.0-3.9 on W-APT or ACCESS for ELLs.</i>	<div>YES- Go to Next Step <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>NO- Do not identify for SLIFE <input type="checkbox"/></div>
5. Functions at least two years below expected grade level in mathematics; <i>Evidence: Below 70% of grade level questions answered correctly on SPPS Math screening Test</i>	<div>YES- Go to Next Step <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>NO- Do not identify for SLIFE <input type="checkbox"/></div>
Student may be preliterate in his/her native language <i>Evidence: Native Language Pre-Literacy Assessment</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student meets ALL FIVE criteria	<div>YES- Student is identified as SLIFE <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>NO- Student is not identified as SLIFE <input type="checkbox"/></div>

***Only for students who meet ALL five criteria. Include a copy of the following documents in the Student CAMPUS record:**

- Determining SLIFE Identification
- Oral Interview Questionnaire results
- Math Screening Test results
- Native Language Pre-Literacy Assessment results

***Note: The Math Screening Test was developed for SLIFE Identification purpose only. The results from the test are not intended for class placement, but can be used as one of the multiple measures to determine student support.**